

Nomenclature of Inorganic Acids

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Recognizing an Acid

At this very beginning level, you will recognize an acid by the fact that its formula starts with H, as in these examples:

HCl
HNO₃
H₂SO₄
HClO₃
H₃BO₃

As you become more sophisticated in your chemistry, you will realize that there are many acid formulas that do not start with H, but those will almost all be left for another time.

There is one exception to this: the formula CH₃COOH should be recognized as acetic acid. The particular way it is written is common in organic chemistry. An alternate way to write acetic acid is HC₂H₃O₂. This is done in the inorganic style which you are currently studying.

One last comment before looking at how to name acids: the formula H₂O should not be considered an acid. It is the formula for water. It is not an acid. When you study acid-base behavior later in the school year, you will learn more about water's role in acid-base chemistry, but not now.

Naming Acids

In order to explain acid naming, the sequence of HCl, HClO, HClO₂, HClO₃, and HClO₄ will be discussed in order.

HCl is a binary acid. All binary acids are named the same way:

1. the prefix "hydro" is used.
2. the root of the anion is used.
3. the suffix "ic" is used.
4. the word "acid" is used as the second word in the name.

The name for HCl is hydrochloric acid. Other binary acids you are responsible for are HF, HBr, HI, and H₂S.

1) HClO is an acid involving a polyatomic ion. You **MUST** recognize the polyatomic ion in the formula. There is no other way to figure out the name. If you don't recognize the polyatomic, then you're sunk without a trace.

The polyatomic ion is ClO⁻ and its name is hypochlorite. Any time you see the "ite" suffix, you change it to "ous" and add the word acid.

The name of HClO is hypochlorous acid.

2) HClO_2 has the ClO_2^- polyatomic ion in it. The name of this ion is chlorite.

Since the "ite" suffix is used, it gets changed to "ous."

The name of HClO_2 is chlorous acid.

3) HClO_3 has the ClO_3^- polyatomic ion and its name is chlorate. Any time you know the "ate" ending is used on the polyatomic, you use "ic" when you write the corresponding acid formula.

The name of HClO_3 is chloric acid.

4) HClO_4 has the ClO_4^- polyatomic ion and its name is perchlorate.

Since the "ate" suffix is used, it gets changed to "ic."

The name of HClO_4 is perchloric acid.

In the ChemTeam's estimation there are two keys. You have to:

1. recognize when a polyatomic is present and
2. know its name.

Only then can you know to change the "ite" suffix to "ous" and the "ate" suffix to "ic" when it is an acid.

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Practice Problems

Name the following acids:

1) H_3PO_4

2) H_2CO_3

3) H_2SO_4

4) HIO_3

5) HF

6) HNO_2

Write the formula for these acids:

7) hydrobromic acid

8) hydrocyanic acid [this has a twist in it]

9) nitric acid

10) sulfurous acid

11) phosphorous acid

12) acetic acid

[Answers](#)

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